

VZCZCXRO0916  
RR RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHAD #0981/01 2881420  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
R 151420Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2995  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000981

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [GCC](#) [PBTS](#) [SA](#) [AQ](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: (S) A LONG HOT SUMMER FOR UAE-SAUDI RELATIONS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD G. OLSON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

REF (A) ABU DHABI 611; REF (B) ABU DHABI 849; REF (C) ABU DHABI 853;  
REF (D) 05 ABU DHABI 3851

#### Summary and Comment

¶1. (C) This summer witnessed a sharp uptick in tensions between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, beginning with the UAE's May decision to pull out of the GCC Monetary Union (after the Headquarters went to Riyadh when the UAE had lobbied for Dubai). Shortly thereafter the Saudis effectively closed a major border crossing, and later refused to allow UAE citizens to enter on ID cards (a GCC norm) because of an irredentist rendering of the UAE border on the back of the card. While Emiratis almost universally interpret these actions as being evidence of the Kingdom's overbearing attitude toward smaller Gulf states, the UAE leadership was careful not to escalate the conflict and worked the issues quietly behind the scenes. The success of this approach has been confirmed by the fact that Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Nayef Al-Saud paid a lengthy visit on UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed last week in Rabat. According to one of MbZ's courtiers, the MbN call constitutes a significant step toward reconciliation.

¶2. (S/NF) While the UAE pays lip service to the idea of GCC unity, the reality is that Abu Dhabi is deeply skeptical of multilateral approaches particularly on military matter. And while publicly expressing close ties with Riyadh, the UAE privately regards the Kingdom as its second greatest security threat after Iran (Israel is not on the list). This is based on historic enmity between the Wahabi tribes of the Najd and the Maliki Bedouin/merchants of the UAE, as well as deep seated if rarely articulated anxiety about what might happen if Saudi Arabia came under a more fundamentalist regime than the Sudairi/Abdullah reign.

¶3. (C) Fortunately for the US, the UAE and Saudi Arabia see eye-to-eye on Iran (and the UAE sees Saudi as a bulwark against Qatari and Omani accommodationism and Kuwaiti wobbliness). That said, the underlying border dispute between the UAE and the Kingdom is real, and unlikely to get better over time. This is an issue that bears our continued attention. End Summary and Comment.

#### UAE - More than an Extra on International Stage

¶4. (C) Since the death of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nayhan in late 2004, his sons President Khalifa bin Zayed, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, and Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, have demonstrated less willingness to defer to the Saudis on all issues. Recent examples of Emirati activism in the regional and international arena include: UAE withdrawal from the GCC Monetary Union in May when Riyadh was chosen over Abu Dhabi to host the Union's central bank; Emirati granting of debt relief to Iraq in June; and, the UAE's successful diplomatic campaign to host the headquarters of the new International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Abu Dhabi -- beating the Germans.

¶5. (C) The younger Emirati successors find themselves increasingly at odds with what they view as geriatric Saudi leadership as they attempt to step out from the shadow of their giant neighbor and carve out a uniquely Emirati identity, seeking greater leadership opportunities, within the region and the international community.

#### It's Not Ancient History to Houses of Saud and Nahyan

-----

¶6. (U) The struggle between the Al Saud and Al Nahyan dynasties can be traced to 1810 when the Al Saud, already in control of most of eastern Arabia, took control of the Buraimi Oasis, the traditional home of the al Nahyan, at the time poor herdsman and pearl fishermen. The Al Saud brought with them a puritanical form of Islam -- Wahabism -- which Emirati leaders still complain about today as responsible for extremism and intolerance in the region.

¶7. (U) For 150 years control of the Buraimi Oasis fell in and out of Al Saud control. In 1952 Sheikh Zayed, then the son of the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, refused a 42 million dollar bribe from the Saudis to give up Abu Dhabi's claim on Buraimi; the amount was recorded in the Guinness Book of World records as the highest bribe ever offered. In 1955 the Saudis were expelled by force by Abu Dhabi and Omani troops with the support of Britain. When the UK announced the end of its treaty arrangement with the trucional emirates in 1968, Saudi King Faisal again set his sights on Buraimi, claiming the area stretching eastward to the coast of Abu Dhabi was rightfully Saudi.

#### 1974 Border Agreement

-----

ABU DHABI 00000981 002 OF 003

¶8. (U) Never actually published, Saudi Arabia "registered" the text of its 1974 border agreement with the UAE with the UN in 1993. It can be found in the UN Treaty Series titled, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates Agreement of the delimitation of boundaries (with exchange of letter and map);" signed at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 21 August 1974 by Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

¶9. (U) According to the terms of the agreement, the KSA gave up its claim on the al Buraimi Oasis (located in eastern Abu Dhabi and including the traditional home territory of the Nahyan Abu Dhabi ruling family). Abu Dhabi, in turn, gave up a 23-kilometer strip of land near Khor al Odeid, cutting off any land connection between Qatar and the UAE. Under the agreement both parties have "joint sovereignty" over the entire area linking the territorial waters of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the high seas. (Note: Many argue that the Saudis primary target here was to isolate Qatar. Disagreement over interpretation of territorial waters also allowed Saudis to dispute the UAE-Qatar Causeway project in 2005. End Note).

¶10. (U) The 1974 Agreement granted Saudi Arabia 80 percent of the land area encompassing the giant al Shaybah oil field, discovered in 1968 by Emiratis, and, unusual for this type of agreement -- 100 percent hydrocarbons rights to exploration and drilling of the entire field, including the 20 percent that remained inside UAE territory.

#### Did Zayed Sign Under Duress?

-----

¶11. (C) Leading up to Sheikh Zayed's death in November 2004 and since, the Emirati leadership has increasingly and publicly tested the Saudis will to reconsider parts of the 1974 agreement, which they believe Sheikh Zayed signed under duress. The ruling generation feels the Saudis mistreated Sheikh Zayed; the agreement was the price the Saudis insisted on in return for recognizing the new nation. It is also possible Zayed feared that if he failed to agree to the 1974 borders, the Emirati confederation would be swallowed up by the Saudi state.

Is the Treaty in Force?

-----  
¶12. (C) We understand that the Saudis view the treaty as being in full force, and likely refer to Article 9 "this agreement shall enter into force immediately on signature." In addition to disputing the substance of the treaty, the UAE has taken the position that the agreement is not in effect because the UAE has not ratified it as called for in the UAE constitution.

#### The Causeway Controversy

-----

¶13. (C) In 2005 tension emerged between the UAE and Saudi Arabia over a decision by the UAE to build a causeway connecting Abu Dhabi to Qatar over the Khor al Odeid waters (The UAE held it had not ceded the territorial waters associated with Khor al Odeid). President Khalifa is reported to have been "furious", and tried to use the Saudi objection to the causeway to reopen negotiations on the entire 1974 agreement. Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef appears to have by 2005 assumed the role of SARG point person on this issue and refused to reopen the issue (Ref D). (Note: The Prince Nayef connection is notable as KSA actions taken this summer (below) against UAE concerning border and immigration issues in July and August were executed by arms of the Ministry of Interior. End Note.)

#### So What's Happened Lately?

-----

¶14. (SBU) On May 27 the UAE pulled out of the GCC Monetary Union in response to the selection of Riyadh as the new organization's headquarters. As the second largest GCC economy, the UAE's move may well tank the entire project. Most economic observers agree, however, that Saudi Arabia is the only GCC country with the sufficient banking infrastructure and know-how to host a central bank for a common Gulf currency.

¶15. (SBU) In July more than 2000 trucks backed-up on the UAE side of the Saudi Border awaiting entry to the Kingdom (Ref A). UAE customs officials reported that the problem was technical and related to the institution of a new Saudi fingerprinting system. The delays caused thousands of drivers to be trapped in temperatures of 110 degrees Fahrenheit, ruining many UAE perishable exports. Although neither side gave any public indication that the delays were politically motivated, local commentators suggested the "humanitarian crisis" was a Saudi attempt to retaliate against the UAE for withdrawing from the

ABU DHABI 00000981 003 OF 003

#### GCC Monetary Union.

¶16. (U) On August 19, the SARG announced that Emirati citizens would have to use their passports to enter the Kingdom, rather than the identity cards traditionally accepted for GCC nationals. Saudi MOI officials explained the decision as a protest of the UAE map depicted on the front of Emirati national ID cards showing a land border between UAE and Qatar. The SARG move was in violation of a GCC agreement allowing member states to enter other GCC countries with only national ID cards. SARG Immigration Chief told the Saudi press that "the Kingdom has taken the step because the map...is not in line with the border agreement signed between the two countries...despite several attempts to address this issue with the UAEG including official diplomatic requests urging the UAE to rectify the map." In a move no doubt meant to trump Prince Nayef, President Khalifa took the moral high ground by announcing in early September that the UAE would continue to allow Saudi citizens to enter the Emirates on their national ID cards (Ref C).

#### Generation and Religious Gap

-----

¶17. (S/NF) As formerly Bedouin, Arab Gulf oil producing states, the UAE and Saudi Arabia indeed share a similar culture and history. Differences in age, religious attitudes, and approach to modernity among the two successor generations of Al Saud and Al Nahyan, however, should not be discounted. The leadership in Abu Dhabi never misses an opportunity to let visiting senior USG officials know that

they regard the Kingdom as run by cantankerous old men surrounded by advisors who believe the earth is flat.

¶18. (S/NF) While Emirati officials acknowledge and lament the presence of a Salafi or Wahabi strain of Islam in the UAE (note: most Emiratis are from the Maliki school, although in the two emirates ruled by the Qawasim, the Hanbali school predominates), senior Abu Dhabi ruling family members have made clear their concern about extremism and have taken concrete actions to minimize both the presence and influence of extremist Islam in the Emirates. Although part of controlling terrorist incitement falls to the security services, perhaps nowhere are UAEG efforts more recognizable than in the sphere of educational reform.

#### UAE Forges Ahead to Create Its Own Identity

-----

¶19. (S/NF) A UAE determined to succeed in establishing a national identity not necessarily in conflict with, but separate from, its big GCC neighbor has inevitably led to an erosion of Saudi influence over UAE decision-making. These so called squabbles should not be dismissed as mere bickering. Distrust among GCC countries (which goes back to tribal days) weakens the effectiveness of the GCC as a collective and as an effective moderate player in the region.

¶20. (S/NF) The UAE is clearly out in front of the other GCC nations on the war in Afghanistan, where it is the only Gulf nation with troops ground fighting the Taliban (and joins Jordan as one of two Arab states with military forces aiding the coalition). In Pakistan, the Saudis and the Emiratis actually back different sides, with the Emiratis supporting the U.S. position to back the elected Prime Minister's government. When it comes to Middle East Peace, the UAE leadership is privately forward thinking, but still prefers to be in line with the Saudis for guidance on its public stance.

¶21. (S/NF) Comment: On what is perhaps our most pressing concern, Iran, the Emiratis report that they continue to work with the Saudis to convince the other GCC members to take a stronger public stance to pressure Iran on its nuclear program. With each member demonstrating a clear preference for conducting bilateral rather than multilateral relations with other powers, as well as each other, real collective action presents a challenge. Ironically, although the UAE and KSA are of one mind about what they perceive to be the existential threat from Tehran, other GCC members, also fearful of Iran, take their own bilateral approach with Iran which is quite different and appears entrenched, particularly in the case of Oman and Qatar. Where UAE-KSA tensions certainly have implications for U.S. priorities in the region, on our most pressing priority at this moment, although the UAE and KSA are united, it is unclear they can produce meaningful collective GCC words or deeds from the GCC. End Comment.

OLSON